OAKVILLE GROCERY

Highway 29's Historical Hub

➡ BY **LAYNE RANDOLPH** | PHOTOS BY **SCOTT CHEBEGIA**

Traveling along Napa Valley's Highway 29, visitors wind past wineries, restaurants, and swaths of vineyards as far as the eye can see. The iconic wine road takes a journey through place and time, notably through Oakville, where a historical hub still exists today. Right there, you will experience a glimpse into the origins of Napa Valley.

On the west side of the road sits the first Napa Valley train station, where wealthy San Franciscans stepped out to enjoy their weekends in the country. Built in 1867, the railroad station closed for business decades ago, but the also-historic Wine Train still passes by daily.

On the east side, the original Oakville Mercantile (now Oakville Grocery) sits next to what was once the Mercantile owner's family home. It is now the 1881 Napa Wine Museum and Oakville Wine Merchant.

It is clear why this has been an iconic road stop for over 140 years. Founded in 1881, the Oakville Grocery, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is the oldest continually operating grocery store in California. Reminiscent of shops from its era, a hand-painted vintage Coca-Cola ad graces the exterior of the building, and wooden benches line a ground-level front porch.

The nostalgic market retains its original 19th-century elements but is updated with 21st-century accoutrements, like a barista section, a Wine Vault, and beer on tap. The Napa Valley icon is a Little House on the Prairie's Oleson's general store shot forward into the future to become a modern-day gourmet food and wine emporium.

To say that the Oakville Grocery was vital in the development of Napa Valley would be a gross understatement. Original owners James and Jennie McQuaid bought the prime Oakville parcel in the late 1800s and offered necessary supplies as varied as local produce, prairie dresses, and pickaxes. In the early twentieth century, the multi-tasking proprietor also served as Railroad Agent and Postmaster, and the store provided the only telegraph and telephone services for miles.

In 2018, Jean-Charles Boisset, proprietor of Boisset Collection, bought Oakville Grocery, and with his unique vision, it somehow became both more historical and modern-day. Boisset updated offerings to focus on sustainable, high-quality, local products and added artisan cheeses and meats, wine from every AVA in the valley, and an onsite Cheesemonger, Todd Jasmin.

Chef and Pizza Captain Domenico "Mimmo" Russo runs the wood-fired pizza program, proudly crafting the most authentic Napoli-style pizza in the valley. The rest of the grocery's chef-created menu includes innovative items like Peach and Prosciutto flatbread, fried chicken, and gourmet sandwiches like the Wagon Wheel, with Fra' mani rosemary ham, Cowgirl Creamery Wagon Wheel cheese, Dijonnaise, and toasted artisan bread.

Boisset is also the proprietor of California's second-oldest train depot. Built in 1868, the Calistoga Depot houses a provisions market and wine shop, distillery, brewery, and individual rail cars converted into The First Millionaire's Saloon (named after Calistoga founder Sam Brannan) and a Champagne and oyster bar.

Either location is a must-stop for a day of wine tasting. Visitors revel in the history on display while selecting gourmet food to go or ordering items to enjoy onsite.

With prime outdoor seating and a self-sample wine tasting experience next door at The Wine Merchant, the Oakville Grocery is a delightful spot to experience culinary excellence, the valley's history, and the vintage Wine Train as it chugs by.

OAKVILLE GROCERY
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